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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/10/2016

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SUBJECT: A YORUBA PLOT TO CONTROL NIGERIA'S ECONOMY?

REF: ABUJA 2335

Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for Reasons 1.4 (b and d)

¶1. (C) Chief David Serena-Dokubo Spiff, an attorney for the Halliburton subsidiary contracted for the Bonny Island LNG project (ref A), requested a meeting with Ambassador to discuss Bonny issues and the Delta situation in general. After discussing the legal and community issues that had forced a Halliburton subsidiary to suspend work on a Bonny Island project, Spiff turned to the general situation in the Niger Delta. He expressed little optimism that things would improve soon.

¶2. (C) Spiff said that much of the problem is the result of a "Yoruba plot." He echoed the longstanding complaints that the Yorubas (from the southwest of Nigeria) control most of the oil industry and much of Nigeria's economy. Spiff blamed the Yoruba for scuttling an attempt to require more local content in oil services, a plan that should have put more business into the Niger delta and its indigenes. He also noted that while indigenes "know that the Yorubas are behind this," the international companies are much more visible and provide the rallying point for the wide range of complaints from the region.

¶3. (C) Spiff said the USG is seen as ignoring the problems instead of being a "reliable proponent of democracy." Spiff said that Rivers State Governor Peter Odili "could perhaps resolve some of the issues" in the delta. However, he continued, solving the problems would "impact negatively" on Odili's presidential ambitions.

¶4. (C) COMMENT: Spiff's analysis of the situation tracks with the general comments floating around the area for many years, particularly the accusations against the Yoruba tribe. The difference appears to be that the complaints are becoming much more public.  
CAMPBELL